

Archbishop O. E. Mathieu and Francophone Immigration to the Archdiocese of Regina

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During the founding convention of the *Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne* held in Duck Lake in February 1912, *l'abbé* Louis Pierre Gravel declared that “sans l'immigration nous n'aurions jamais eu comme évêque de Régina, le meilleur des Évêques, un vrai Catholique celui-là, et Canadien français.”¹ Following an intense internal struggle between Anglophone and Francophone Catholics for the selection of a Bishop to occupy the newly created See of Regina,² the Sacred Consistory reviewed various census reports illustrating that French-speaking Catholics represented the largest ethnic group within the new diocese and named Mgr. Olivier-Elzéar Mathieu as Bishop.

Born and educated in Quebec City, Olivier-Elzéar Mathieu was elevated to the priesthood by Archbishop Taschereau in 1878. Except for a sojourn of one year in Rome, he spent his entire life in Quebec City, teaching philosophy at Laval University where he also served as rector for nine years prior to being appointed Bishop of Regina in 1911.

Mgr. Mathieu's initial reaction was to decline his nomination, reject his new responsibility for reasons of ill health.³ How could he leave his beloved city of Quebec, his students, his colleagues, his family, his friends? However, his moral sense of duty compelled him to obey his superiors. Filled with anguish, with tears in his eyes, the newly consecrated Bishop departed from his cherished province to assume his new responsibility in November, 1911.

The diocese of Regina had been carved out of the archdiocese of Saint-Boniface. The new diocese stretched from the border of Manitoba in the

¹ Georges HÉBERT, *Les Débuts de Gravelbourg, 1905-1965*, Gravelbourg: 1965, p. 24.

² For more detail on this issue, the reader should consult : R. CHOUQUETTE, “O. E. Mathieu et l'érection du diocèse de Régina,” *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, 1975, pp. 101-116.

³ *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 1 décembre 1911.

east to the Alberta border in the west. It was bounded on the south by the 49th parallel and on the north by an artificial line running approximately thirty-five miles south of Saskatoon between townships 30 and 31. The new diocese covered more than one half the settled portion of the province of Saskatchewan and, as of April 1911, contained 51,177 Catholics.⁴

The Catholic population was distributed as follows:

15,964	French
13,000	Ruthenians
12,470	Germans
4,211	English
2,295	Polish
1,519	Hungarians
1,000	Indians
718	Others ⁵

The large majority of the French-speaking Catholics resided south of the Canadian Pacific Railway main line and had been recruited from Quebec, the United States and Europe by members of the clergy and laymen.

For years, Mgrs. Taché and Langevin had sought to strengthen the Francophone element of Manitoba by promoting the immigration of Francophones from Quebec, the United States and Europe.⁶ When arable homesteads became scarce in Manitoba, they had exhorted their clergymen to occupy virgin lands beyond the borders of Manitoba with French-speaking Catholic settlers in advance of the anticipated influx of Anglo-Protestant farmers and foreign immigrants. The aim of these clergymen was to populate isolated regions exclusively with Francophone Catholics and thereby create compact “blocks” of French Catholic settlement where no Anglo-Protestant

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1 août 1911.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ For more information regarding the immigration policies of Mgrs Taché and Langevin, see Robert PAINCHAUD, “The Catholic Church and the Movement of Francophones to the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1915,” Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Ottawa, 1976.

settlers could secure land once a railway line was constructed in the area.

Accordingly, *l'abbé* Jean Gaire, who had himself immigrated from France to Manitoba in 1888, sought to create a "French Triangle," a French Catholic enclave in the southeastern corner of Saskatchewan during the 1890's and the early years of the 20th century. He ventured to France and Belgium several times to populate his triangle, bordered by Wauchope and Cantal in the east and Forget in the west. "Les trois colonies forment un immense triangle et... c'est sur ces côtés et à l'intérieur que d'autres colonies du plus brillant avenir pourront être fondées."⁷ *L'abbé* Gaire's efforts were seconded by *l'abbé* Moïse Blais. A *missionnaire-colonisateur* for the diocese of Saint-Boniface from 1898 to 1907, Blais also recruited Francophones from Quebec and the United States to occupy land within *l'abbé* Gaire's "French Triangle."⁸ Unfortunately for Gaire and Blais, their grand scheme was only partially successful.

Similarly, in 1906, Mgr. Langevin had recruited *l'abbé* Louis-Pierre-Gravel from the parish of St. John the Baptist in Yonkers, New York and had him appointed by the Laurier government as a *missionnaire-colonisateur* for the purpose of recruiting French-Canadian expatriates in the United States. Mgr. Langevin was responding to a suggestion made by the *curé* of Willow Bunch, *l'abbé* Alphonse Lemieux, that French-speaking Catholics occupy the isolated lands south-west of Moose Jaw before they were taken up by Anglo-Protestant settlers.⁹ Having recruited settlers in his native province of Quebec and the United States, *l'abbé* Gravel, founded or assisted in the establishment of several parishes such as Gravelbourg, Laflèche, Mazonod, Meyronne, Courval, Lac Pelletier, Coderre and Les Cyprès between 1907 and 1912. Simultaneously, *l'abbé* A. Royer, a French priest from l'Auvergne, founded Ponteix within the same area. Once again, however, the creation of an exclusion "block" of Francophone settlement failed to materialize because of the difficulties in securing a sufficient number of French-speaking settlers.

Not all Francophone parishes or communities were established by members of the clergy. The colony of St. Hubert de la Rollandrie near Whitewood was built by members of the French aristocracy during the 1880's.¹⁰ Pierre Foursin, secretary to the Canadian Agent General in Parish,

⁷ Jean GAIRE, *Dix années de Missions au Grand Nord-Ouest canadien*, Lille Imprimerie de l'Orphelinat de Dom Bosco, 1898, p. 119.

⁸ Storthoaks was founded in 1899 by French-Canadian expatriates from Chicago.

⁹ *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 15 février 1920.

¹⁰ Donatien FRÉMONT, *Les Français dans l'Ouest canadien*, Winnipeg Éditions de la Liberté, 1959, pp. 84-91.

Hector Fabre, had created *La Société Foncière du Canada* which had resulted in the establishment of Montmartre in 1893.¹¹ Willow Bunch began as a fur-trading post built by a French-Canadian, Jean-Louis Légaré, to deal with the Métis residing in the area in 1870. Over the years, more and more of Légaré's relatives and friends from St. Jacques, county of Montcalm in the province of Quebec, migrated to what became the community of Willow Bunch.¹²

The establishment of these parishes along with several others failed to prevent the infiltration into these communities and their neighbouring areas of a substantial number of Anglophone and foreign settlers. The Catholic Church had tried to occupy underdeveloped areas in the district of Assiniboia, what became the southern half of the province of Saskatchewan after 1905, in advance of the wave of immigrants and the construction of branch railway lines into these areas. However, too few Francophones migrated to the Canadian West in general and these aforementioned areas in particular during this ten to twenty year period. Quebecers residing in the overly populated parishes along the St. Lawrence were encouraged by their clerical and political leaders to settle north of Montreal, in the Lake St. Jean area, or in eastern and northern Ontario. Some did, but many more chose to ignore these suggestions and migrated to the United States to work in textile factories. Once established south of the Canadian-American border, few of these French-speaking labourers were prepared to abandon the security of their jobs to *tenter fortune* on the bald Canadian prairies. Similarly, appeals by clergymen and lay government agents failed to generate a steady flow of immigrants from French-speaking European countries to the prairie west.¹³ Thus, instead of compact "blocks" of French-speaking Catholic settlers, the efforts made by the church and lay leaders resulted in the creation of a "string" of Francophone Catholic communities or, as Robert Painchaud puts it, a continuous "chain type" of group settlement.¹⁴

When Mgr. Olivier-Elzéar Mathieu assumed his responsibilities as Bishop of Regina in 1911, French-speaking Catholics represented approximately one third of the Catholic population and approximately six per cent of the total population of the newly created diocese. There were no virgin territories left to conquer in advance of foreign and Anglo-Protestant

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-100.

¹² Adrien CHABOT et Clovis RONDEAU [Histoire de Willow Bunch], Vol. I, *La Montagne de Bois, 1870-1920* (RONDEAU); Vol. II, *Willow Bunch, 1920-1970* (CHABOT), Winnipeg: Canadian Publishers Ltd., 1970.

¹³ Robert PAINCHAUD, *op. cit.*, pp. 295-375.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-78.

immigrants. The Francophone population represented a very small minority interspersed in a sea of English, German, Scandinavian, Ukrainian and Hungarian people who were arriving in large numbers in the hope of finding “their pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.”

The new leader of the Catholic population of southern Saskatchewan was a man of great political skill, a shrewd diplomat, a close confidant of prominent politicians such as Wilfrid Laurier. All Catholic and Protestant government leaders in Saskatchewan were very impressed with his credentials, his reputation, his background. His presence augured well for the French minority.

Within a few months following his arrival in Regina, Mathieu was invited to attend the founding convention of *L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan* at Duck Lake. During the sessions, *l'abbé* Louis-Pierre Gravel presented a speech on colonization in which he explained that virgin lands were becoming a rarity. What was needed now, besides farmers, were members of the liberal arts professions – such as French-speaking lawyers, doctors, teachers, priests and nuns – who would form an association of professionals to systematize the takeover of certain districts by incoming Francophone settlers much as had happened in the Eastern Townships of Quebec after 1850. This professional association would establish information offices within the major centres of the province to guide French-speaking immigrants to districts threatened by the presence of non-French settlers. Since it was no longer possible to occupy virgin “blocks” of land in advance of Anglo and foreign settlers, the French minority would now try to conquer territory held by non-French settlers.¹⁵ Having spent only three months in his diocese, Mathieu listened attentively to *l'abbé* Gravel's grandiose plans for francophone colonization and was greatly impressed.

Mathieu also attended the first congress of *La Société du Parler Français au Canada* held in Quebec City in June 1912 as head of the delegation from Saskatchewan selected during the Duck Lake convention, and it was he who assumed the responsibility of promoting *l'abbé* Gravel's strategy for the promotion of francophone immigration and colonization. His address presented to members of the congress was almost an exact replica of that made by *l'abbé* Gravel three months earlier in Duck Lake.

Ainsi, dans l'Ouest, par exemple, pour conserver notre langue, pour sauvegarder notre religion, nous aurions besoin d'instituteurs, de

¹⁵ *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, 21 mars 1912.

médecins, de religieuses, de prêtres. Évidemment, gardez tous ceux dont vous avez besoin. Mais s'il en est quelques-uns qui veulent et peuvent s'en aller, pourquoi ne pas les diriger vers les autres parties de notre beau pays, où leurs compatriotes ont besoin d'eux et les recevraient à bras ouverts?

Quel bien feraient, dans les prairies de l'Ouest, quelle vie heureuse y pourraient mener, toutes ces bonnes familles canadiennes-françaises qui croient aller trouver le bonheur dans les villes manufacturières des États-Unis et qui, le plus souvent, y vont épuiser leurs forces, ruiner leur santé, dans un travail aussi pénible que peu lucratif.¹⁶

In between sessions of the congress, Mathieu summoned prominent Quebecers and representatives from the prairie provinces to a meeting held in *la grande salle des Promotions* at Laval University to discuss the issue of immigration from Quebec to the Canadian West. What was needed, he insisted, was the creation of *bureaux de renseignements* in the major communities of Quebec and the Canadian West which would advise those leaving *la belle province* to settle in *un milieu sympathique*.¹⁷

During a plenary session of the congress, the delegates approved a motion presented by Mgr. Mathieu calling for the creation of information offices in Quebec and the Canadian West to divert the exodus of French Canadians from the United States to Francophone parishes on the prairies, particularly the surplus of doctors, lawyers and teachers.¹⁸

A *bureau de renseignement* had existed in Montreal since 1895 manned by clerical government repatriation agents representing the various dioceses of the Canadian West.¹⁹ What Mathieu was probably seeking was a clear commitment by Quebec's clerical and lay leaders above and beyond the lukewarm endorsement of Francophone immigration to the Canadian West contained in the *lettre circulaire des évêques* of 1871 which had dominated the actions and ideology of most of Quebec's leaders for over forty years.

The motion approved by the delegates attending the first congress of *La Société du Parler Français au Canada* resulted in the creation of information

¹⁶ Premier Congrès de la langue française au Canada, *Compte rendu*, Québec: Action Sociale Ltée, 1913, pp. 395-396.

¹⁷ *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 15 juillet 1912.

¹⁸ *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, 29 août 1912.

¹⁹ Robert PAINCHAUD, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

offices in western dioceses²⁰ and the retention of the office in existence in Montreal which had been subjected to repeated attacks by governmental and clerical leaders in Ottawa and Quebec. Mathieu also received numerous letters of inquiry on the Canadian West from Quebecers in all walks of life,²¹ an indication of the publicity his motion had generated within the Quebec press. It is, however, impossible to determine the number of professionals, labourers and farmers who responded to Mathieu's appeal by migrating to the prairies. Archival resources provide evidence of a few cases. Arsène Godin, a graduate from the Laval University medical school, settled in Willow Bunch.²² J-Émile Lacoursière, whose parents were close friends of Mgr. Mathieu, migrated west in 1912 and practised law in Ponteix and Montmartre.²³

The results of Mathieu's appeal were somewhat disheartening but not totally unexpected. Mathieu *est revenu à la charge*, to request the appointment of *l'abbé E. Dubois*, a French clergyman formerly from the diocese of Mende, who offered his services to recruit Francophone settlers from Belgium, France, the United States and Quebec to establish new parishes in south-west Saskatchewan between Ponteix, Meyronne and Val Marie.²⁴ *L'abbé L. P. Gravel* had been dismissed by the Borden government because of his affinity with the Liberal party. By the tone of his letter to the Postmaster-General, the Honourable L. P. Pelletier, it is evident that Mathieu naively assumed that the individual he was recommending would automatically be appointed by the government to replace Gravel.²⁵ *L'abbé Dubois* failed to secure the position.

In the meantime, *l'abbé L. P. Gravel* wrote to Mgr. Mathieu from Ottawa asking for his assistance to be reinstated as *a missionnaire-colonisateur*. Since his dismissal by the Conservative government, he had toured at his own expense several regions of Quebec such as Joliette, Plessisville,

²⁰ *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 15 septembre 1912.

²¹ Archdiocesan Archives of Regina, *Affaires personnelles de Mgr. Mathieu, 1911-13*. This file contains several letters from various parts of Quebec requesting information on climatic conditions, potential earning power of doctors and lawyers, etc....

²² Dr. Arsène Godin's papers are in the Archives of Saskatchewan.

²³ Personal correspondence between J-Émile Lacoursière and the author which will be deposited in the Archives of Saskatchewan.

²⁴ Archdiocesan Archives of Regina, *Immigration and Colonization*, Star City, September 16, 1912. *L'abbé E. Dubois* to Mathieu. The author wishes to express his gratitude to Archbishop Charles Halpin of Regina for permission to use the archdiocesan archives.

²⁵ A. A. R., *Letters of Mgr. Mathieu*, Regina, December 14, 1912, Mathieu to L. P. Pelletier.

Victoriaville and Arthabaska in an effort to direct settlers towards the province of Saskatchewan. He planned further repatriation work in the very near future in the states of New York and Connecticut but his financial resources were so meagre that in order to fulfill this task adequately he would need some form of government recognition and revenue. (The salary of a *missionnaire-colonisateur* was \$600. per year plus expenses).²⁶ No direct action was taken by the Bishop on Gravel's request.

Bishop Mathieu's failure to secure the appointment of a *missionnaire-colonisateur* to replace *l'abbé* Gravel in his diocese and his apparent inaction since mid-June 1912 in the field of colonization brought strongly worded criticisms from prominent members of the Francophone minority after the second congress of *l'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne* held in Regina in September, 1913. Several members of the A.C.F.C.'s executive suspected that Mathieu's ideology on the issue of immigration from *la belle province* to the Canadian West resembled too closely that of his former colleagues within the Church hierarchy of Quebec: French-Canadians migrating to the prairies would be lost in a sea of Anglo-Saxons and foreigners.

Such a conclusion is not without substance. When one of his former students from Laval University, Doctor Gosselin, visited the Chancery in Regina and declared with tears in his eyes that he would not live in the West even if they paid him \$25,000 per year, Bishop Mathieu had replied: "Moi non plus, mais j'y reste pour Dieu."²⁷ Similarly, following the visit of several prominent Quebecers to Regina in 1913, Mgr. Mathieu wrote in his private journal:

Visiteurs (du Québec) comprennent que nos gens de l'Est eussent mieux fait de venir, il y a une trentaine d'années, s'emparer de nos belles terres d'ici que des'en aller se fixer aux É.-U. pour y mener le plus souvent une vie de misères et d'ennuis.

Il faut le dire, pour justifier et disculper un peu nos compatriotes, on était loin de les encourager à venir ici. Mgr. Taché avait été d'abord sous l'impression que les prairies de l'Ouest ne seraient jamais cultivables. Il avait exprimé cette pensée dans des lettres que nos journaux avaient

²⁶ A. A. R., *Affaires personnelles de Mgr. Mathieu*, Ottawa, 18 février 1913, L. P. Gravel to Mathieu.

²⁷ Archives of Saskatchewan, *Journal de Mgr O. E. Mathieu*, Vol. 1, November 1911-September 1922. (Microfilm copy of the original kept at the Laval University Archives.)

reproduites et qu'ils publiaient encore quand ce grand évêque avait reconnu son erreur. Ces lettres ont grandement contribué à éloigner nos gens de l'Ouest canadien.

Doivent-ils y venir maintenant? S'il en est quelques-uns qui désirent s'y fixer, qu'on leur donne une bonne direction, et qu'on fasse en sorte de les placer au milieu des gens de leur race, de leur religion, afin qu'ils ne soient pas exposés à perdre leur langue et surtout leur foi.²⁸

Mathieu was implying in his personal journal that French-Canadians should remain in Quebec and only those who were definitely compelled to leave their native province should be directed to settle in French Catholic parishes on the prairies instead of expatriating themselves to the United States. However, the criticism directed against him and the realization that the French-speaking members of his flock expected him to play a more aggressive role in the field of colonization inspired Mathieu to more actively seek the appointment of a *missionnaire-colonisateur*.

In October 1913, Mgr. Mathieu wrote to the Minister of the Interior, the Honourable Dr. W. J. Roche, requesting the appointment of Reverend Father J. Libert, an intelligent, active, flamboyant orator, who knew many French-Canadians in the United States. Mathieu also added that he was the only Bishop without a *missionnaire-colonisateur* and "my apparent negligence is very often cast up to me."²⁹

The wheels of government turn very slowly. Six months elapsed before Mathieu received a reply from the Minister of the Interior informing him that Arthur Dubuisson, a staunch Conservative in Gravelbourg, had been appointed in April 1912 as an immigration agent to replace *l'abbé* Gravel in the diocese of Regina. In addition, Dr. Roche pointed out that not all dioceses had an immigration agent.

Mgr. Mathieu's patience was wearing thin. He was beginning to realize that as a member of a minority it was substantially more difficult to secure government favours than it was for his counterparts in Quebec. The sarcastic

²⁸ *Ibid.* Mathieu was not the only one who believed that Taché had discouraged immigration from Quebec to the Canadian West. This belief was prevalent throughout Quebec during the 1880's and 1890's and kept resurfacing in the press. For more information on this issue, refer to Robert PAINCHAUD, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-167.

²⁹ A. A. R., *Letters of Mgr. Mathieu*, Regina [October 30, 1913?], Mathieu to Roche.

and abrupt tone of his letter of reply to the Minister of the Interior illustrates his change of attitude and his determination to persist.

Allow me to say that your letter has surprised me and has placed me in an awkward position towards my diocesans...

You say that M. [sic] Dubuisson is my representative I have never heard him spoken of; nobody here knows that he is a colonization agent. I have absolutely no dealings with him.

Among the other dioceses that you mention in the Ouest [sic] as not having any agent, you name some that are not dioceses at all, but Prefectures Apostolic which are almost situated near the North Pole and it will be a difficult matter to send colonists there. The Province of Saskatchewan is not to be compared to those.³⁰

After a further exchange of correspondence between the Postmaster-General, the Minister of the Interior, and the Bishop of Regina, *l'abbé* Napoléon Poirier, formerly of the diocese of Saint Hyacinthe and curé of Saint-Maurice de Bellegarde since 1903, was appointed *missionnaire-colonisateur* for the diocese of Regina in June 1914 at an annual salary of \$600. plus expenses. Mathieu had learned a very important lesson: as a representative of a small minority, he would have to use all of his diplomatic skill and fight continuously for even minor concessions from government authorities.

L'abbé Napoléon Poirier remained as a *missionnaire-colonisateur* until 1922. During that period of time he toured various regions of the United States and rural areas within the province of Quebec. However, he often encountered animosity and opposition to his activities within *la belle province* and in desperation often turned to his Archbishop for assistance.³¹ In such instances, Mathieu replied to Poirier and others fulfilling similar tasks,

Si vous avez sous la main les lettres pastorales des évêques du Québec, vous pourriez lire celle du mois d'octobre 1871 à propos de

³⁰ A. A. R., *Letters of Mgr Mathieu*, Regina, April 1, 1914, Mathieu to Dr. Roche.

³¹ Mgr. O. E. Mathieu was elevated to the position of Archbishop in 1915.

la colonisation du Nord-Ouest. Elle vous donnerait une bonne réponse à nos gens de Chicoutimi.³²

While *l'abbé* Poirier attempted to recruit Francophone settlers in Quebec and the United States, *l'abbé* Arthur Benoit,³³ with the blessing of his Bishop, organized in 1916 the *Compagnie Canadienne de Colonisation*. The company, with a projected capital of \$500,000 divided into 5,000 shares of \$100 each payable at the rate of one dollar per month, was founded to promote Franco-Catholic settlement in Saskatchewan.³⁴ The head office was located in the Catholic Club Building in Regina. The executive consisted of a mixture of clergymen, such as *l'abbé* A. Benoit, *l'abbé* L. P. Gravel, *l'abbé* Napoléon Poirier, and several prominent Catholic laymen representing various French parishes.³⁵ The company proposed to purchase farms from non-French speaking settlers in the vicinity of French Catholic parishes and sell them to heads of families recruited in Quebec and the New England States. The purchaser would be given fifteen to twenty years to repay the company at an annual interest rate of six percent.³⁶ This cooperative venture never achieved its goals. It experienced difficulty in selling its shares and in recruiting settlers. It was also accused of charging exorbitant prices for its lands.

As early as 1917, *l'abbé* Napoléon Poirier had asked to be relieved of his duties as *missionnaire-colonisateur*. He had found the dual role of curé and government immigration agent too burdensome. Fearing that he would experience difficulties in securing the appointment of a successor from a Conservative government, Archbishop Mathieu had rejected *l'abbé* Poirier's appeal. He bowed to *l'abbé* Poirier's wishes only after the return to power of the federal Liberals. Less than a month following the resignation of *l'abbé* Poirier, the King's government agreed to Mathieu's request and appointed *l'abbé* Louis Pierre Gravel as immigration agent for the archdiocese of Regina.³⁷

³² Archives of Alberta, *Fonds des Oblats, Correspondance de Mgr Mathieu*, Régina, 2 août 1919, Mathieu à [?].

³³ *L'abbé* Arthur Benoit was appointed Secretary of the Chancery by Mgr. Mathieu in 1917.

³⁴ *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, 11 mai 1916 and 25 mai 1916.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8 mars 1917.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 8 juin 1916.

³⁷ P. A. C. Immigration Papers, Box 231, File 595-25-3, Ottawa, December 28, 1922, Supervisor of Personnel to W. Foran, Secretary of the Civil Service Commission.

In his annual report submitted to his superiors for 1924, *l'abbé* Gravel reported that he had received 719 letters, dispatched 867 of them, conducted 1395 interviews, visited 105 communities, distributed 1000 brochures and presented 30 conférences attended by 4782 individuals.³⁸ He does not, however, specify the number of people influenced to settle in southern Saskatchewan.

Ill health in 1925 compelled *l'abbé* Gravel to restrict his activities dramatically. Few if any French-Canadians migrated to the archdiocese of Regina in 1925 according to Mgr. Mathieu.

Entre nous, une lettre que je recevais il y a quelque temps de Mgr. Prud'homme m'a fait de la peine. Il me disait que son diocèse dans la dernière année avait reçu des centaines de nouveaux colons canadiens-français et, dans le mien, il n'en est pas venu... Moi aussi je serais heureux de voir accroître le nombre de mes compatriotes dans mon diocèse et il y a tant de districts où nous pourrions les placer et où ils seraient bien.³⁹

Gravel died in February 1926, and after searching for "un prêtre assez âgé, intelligent, laborieux, un homme avec des aptitudes naturelles pour ce genre de travail," Mathieu recommended *l'abbé* Adolphe Erny of Gravelbourg.⁴⁰

The Archbishop of Regina had recognized after a few years on the prairies that government immigration agents and even a cooperative company were necessary to supplement the efforts of the *Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne* in the area of colonization. If the Franco-Catholic minority within his diocese was to survive, it needed reinforcements from Quebec and the United States to surpass or at least keep pace with the growth of the population as a whole. However, among those responding to the appeals to migrate to Western Canada, there were too few members of the liberal arts professions. Mathieu was convinced that a minority without an élite resembled an army without a commander. Since lawyers, doctors and teachers from Quebec refused to migrate to the prairies, he would create an élite *sur place*, he would build a college.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Box 127, File 535325, Montréal, 31 janvier 1925, L. P. Gravel to l'abbé J. A. Ouellette.

³⁹ A. A. R., *Immigration and Colonization*, Regina, 20 février 1926, Mgr. Mathieu to l'abbé J. A. Ouellette.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Ce que j' ai constaté en arrivant ici, ce que je constate encore, c' est que tous nos catholiques sont ignorants. Nous n' avons pas d' hommes instruits...

Si je pouvais sans bruit fonder ce collège [de Gravelbourg] avant de mourir, je croirais avoir fait l' oeuvre de ma vie parce que j' aurais sauvé la langue française dans toute la province pour toujours...

Je veux conserver la langue dans l' Ouest, pour le bien de laquelle je travaille en voulant former une génération d' hommes qui pourront défendre ses droits.⁴¹

Immigration was crucial, but it did not suffice. Recognizing that Francophone immigration to the Canadian West would always be minimal and that, as a consequence, the French-speaking people would always constitute a small portion of the total population in southern Saskatchewan, Mathieu considered the creation of an élite to be of crucial importance. There was no point in attracting French-speaking Catholics to his diocese unless the survival of their language and their faith could be ensured. The Archbishop saw his dream reach fruition when the College Mathieu of Gravelbourg opened its doors in the fall of 1918.

The college constituted one of Mathieu's major accomplishments. Under the guidance of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, hundreds of young men were prepared for the tasks which awaited them in the French-speaking parishes of southern Saskatchewan. However, as the college was turning out its first graduates, the federal government bowed to pressure from the Orange Lodge and several Protestant sects and abolished the system of clerical immigration agents in 1927.⁴² Bishops and Archbishops in the Canadian West lost their immigration agents with the stroke of a pen. After 1927, the recruitment of settlers in Quebec and the United States became next to impossible without government funding. Mathieu and his counterparts on the prairies battled strenuously to counteract the pressure exerted on federal government authorities by the Orange Lodge and the Anglican Church, but to no avail. The French-speaking residents on the prairies could no longer rely on the incoming trickle of immigrants from the East to strengthen their parishes.

⁴¹ A. A. R., *Affaires personnelles de Mgr Mathieu, 1916-1921*, Regina, 9 avril 1921, Mathieu to the Honourable Premier of Quebec, A. Taschereau.

⁴² P. A. C. *Immigration Papers*, Box 217, File 535325-4, Ottawa, December 10, 1927, Deputy Minister of Immigration and Colonization to Reverend J. A. Ouellette.

Archbishop Mathieu had worked assiduously to serve his people and his labours eventually took their toll. After a prolonged illness, Archbishop Olivier-Elzéar Mathieu died in October, 1929, a month prior to his seventy-sixth birthday. The Francophone population of Saskatchewan had lost its most respected and most renowned leader.

During the years Mathieu had served as Bishop of Regina, the French-speaking Catholic population of his diocese had increased from 15,964 to 28,500,⁴³ but this increase had barely kept pace with the overall growth of the population as a whole in southern Saskatchewan. In 1911 French-speaking Catholics in the diocese of Regina represented slightly more than six percent of the population. By 1931, the percentage of Franco-phones had not changed significantly.

When Mathieu first arrived in his diocese, he was only too aware that the best homesteads were already occupied. He also felt that Quebecers and French-Canadians residing in the United States would never migrate to the prairies in large numbers. According to Mathieu, the French-Canadians should have migrated to the Canadian West thirty years earlier,⁴⁴ instead of crossing the border into the United States. Despite his personal views, he responded to pressure from his diocesans, and fought for the appointment of a clerical immigration agent. This agent would recruit a few families in Quebec and the United States. These families would be directed to areas where they would by their mere presence help to consolidate existing Francophone parishes.

However, the small influx of immigrants would not by itself suffice to permit the French-speaking Catholic minority of southern Saskatchewan to survive. This minority lacked leadership, a dynamic nucleus of well educated men. Quebec could provide a few of these leaders but the majority of them would have to be trained locally within a college built for that purpose. Immigration and an educated nucleus of leaders: these were the key ingredients required to ensure the survival of the French-speaking Catholic population of southern Saskatchewan according to Archbishop Mathieu.

Unfortunately, the Francophone minority of the archdiocese of Regina suffered successive setbacks during the late 1920's which served to undermine Mathieu's accomplishments. These reversals began as has already been noted, with the elimination of clerical immigration agents in 1927. Two years later

⁴³ *Census of Canada*, 1931, pp. 438-453.

⁴⁴ Mgr. Mathieu referred to the fact that the French-Canadians should have emigrated to the prairies thirty years earlier in his address presented at *La Société du Parler Français au Canada* and in his private journal in 1914.

Mathieu died and was replaced by a cleric of Irish descent, Mgr. J. C. McGuigan. Mathieu's death coincided with the beginnings of the depression and a prolonged drought on the prairies. The depressed economy led to the exodus of those who could move more easily and find security elsewhere in Canada, the members of the Francophone intelligentsia. For example, J. Émile Lacoursière, who had settled in the diocese of Regina in 1912, departed to practice law in Sudbury, Ontario during the early 1930's. These events served to seriously weaken the foundation laid by Mgr. Mathieu to ensure the cultural survival of the French-speaking Catholic population of southern Saskatchewan.